

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SS-15 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 USIA-06

AID-05 CEA-01 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 EA-06 FRB-03

INR-07 IO-10 NEA-09 NSAE-00 OPIC-03 SP-02 TRSE-00

CIEP-01 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 STR-01 TAR-01 /103 W

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R 121727Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9205

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMCONSUL BELFAST

AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

AMCONSUL LIVERPOOL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 03812

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, UK, EEC

SUBJECT: EC MEMBERSHIP: PROGRESS TOWARD REFERENDUM

REF: LONDON 3116

1. SUMMARY: MARCH 11 WAS PIVOTAL DAY FOR BRITISH MEMBERSHIP IN EC. IN ADDITION TO SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION OF RENEGOTIATION EFFORT AT DUBLIN EC SUMMIT (SEPTTEL), COMMONS DEBATED EC REFERENDUM WHITE PAPER (REFTTEL), WITH GOVERNMENT CARRYING PROCEDURAL VOTE ON DEBATE BY MARGIN OF 50 VOTES. WE UNDERSTAND WILSON WILL ANNOUNCE GOVERNMENT RECOMMENDATION ON RENEGOTIATED TERMS TO COMMONS  
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MARCH 19, FOLLOWING MARCH 17 MEETING WITH PARLIAMENTARY

LABOR PARTY (PLP) AND FULL CABINET DECISION BY MID-DAY MARCH 19. AS A RESULT OF THESE DEVELOPMENTS, OUTLOOK FOR WILSON'S TIMETABLE HAS IMPROVED. END SUMMARY.

2. CONCURRENT WITH SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION OF EC RENEGOTIATION EXERCISE AT DUBLIN (SEPTEL), HOUSE OF COMMONS MARCH 11 DEBATED EC REFERENDUM WHITE PAPER WHICH WAS PUBLISHED FEBRUARY 26. LEADER OF HOUSE EDWARD SHORT OPENED DEBATE FOR GOVERNMENT, REVIEWING WHITE PAPER PROPOSALS AND STRESSING GOVERNMENT'S FLEXIBILITY ON ALL BUT SINGLE NATIONAL VOTE COUNT. GOVERNMENT POSITION ON THIS QUESTION, HOWEVER, APPEARS AMBIGUOUS (PERHAPS INTENTIONALLY), AS MINISTER OF STATE GERALD FOWLER LATER IN DEBATE SAID "GOVERNMENT'S MINDS ARE NOT CLOSED ON HOW COUNT SHOULD BE CONDUCTED".

3. HIGHLIGHT OF DEBATE CAME AS MARGARET THATCHER MADE HER FIRST MAJOR SPEECH IN COMMONS SINCE ASSUMING CONSERVATIVE PARTY LEADERSHIP. PRINCIPAL THRUST OF HER ARGUMENT WAS THAT REFERENDUM WAS A RISKY CONSTITUTIONAL PRECEDENT AND THAT LABOR PARTY HAD CYNICALLY ADOPTED THIS DEVICE TO AVOID INTERNAL PARTY SPLIT ON EC ISSUE. TORY BACKBENCHERS ROARED WITH DELIGHT. HER CONSTITUTIONAL ARGUMENT, HOWEVER, WAS DEVASTATED (TO GREAT AMUSEMENT OF LABOR BACKBENCHERS) WHEN FORMER LABOR FOREIGN SECRETARY MICHAEL STEWART POINTED OUT THAT AUTHOR OF HER PRINCIPAL CONSTITUTIONAL LAW REFERENCE HAD ALSO CONCLUDED THAT WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE WOULD BE UNCONSTITUTIONAL. CONCLUSION OF DEBATE WAS CLEAR VICTORY FOR GOVERNMENT. SCOTTISH NATIONALISTS, ULSTER UNIONISTS, SOME LIBERALS AND HANDFUL OF CONSERVATIVES (WHO IGNORED THREE LINE WHIP) JOINED LABOR TO DEFEAT TORY PROCEDURAL MOTION BY 50 VOTES. IN A RELATED DEVELOPMENT, MRS. THATCHER LATER ANNOUNCED APPOINTMENT OF DEPUTY LEADER WILLIAM WHITELAW TO TAKE OVER-ALL CHARGE OF TORY'S CAMPAIGN TO KEEP UK IN EC.

4. WE HAVE HEARD FROM VARIOUS GOVERNMENT SOURCES THAT WILSON WILL ANNOUNCE GOVERNMENT DECISION ON RENEGOTIATED TERMS TO COMMONS ON MARCH 19. PRELIMINARY TO ANNOUNCEMENT, GOVERNMENT WILL CALL SPECIAL MEETING OF PLP (MARCH  
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17) AND DISCUSS DETAILS FULLY IN CABINET, WITH FINAL CABINET DECISION OCCURRING BY MID-DAY MARCH 19. IT IS GENERALLY ACCEPTED THAT CABINET WILL ENDORSE AND COMMONS WILL APPROVE RENEGOTIATED TERMS BY OVERWHELMING MAJORITY, THOUGH PLP IS EXPECTED TO BE ALLOWED FREE VOTE. GOVERNMENT ALSO PLANS TO INTRODUCE REFERENDUM LEGISLATION BEFORE THE EASTER RECESS, WHICH BEGINS MARCH 27, WITH REFERENDUM ITSELF STILL SCHEDULED FOR THE SECOND HALF OF

JUNE -- IN COMMONS YESTERDAY SHORT MENTIONED JUNE 19 OR  
26, IF ELECTION IS TO FALL ON TRADITIONAL THURSDAY, OR  
JUNE 23 OR 30, IF GOVERNMENT OPTS FOR MONDAY.

4. COMMENT: SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION OF RENEGOTIATION RE-  
MOVES THE LARGEST OBSTACLE TO WILSON'S JUNE REFERENDUM  
TIMETABLE, AND YESTERDAY'S VOTE ON THE REFERENDUM WHITE  
PAPER INDICATES THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL NOT HAVE TO FACE  
A UNITED OPPOSITON WHEN THE LEGISLATION COMES TO A VOTE.  
PRESENT SIGNS ARE THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL EVEN BE ABLE  
TO WITHSTAND SOME BACKBENCH DEFECTIONS IN THE EVENT IT

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REFUSES TO BUDGE ON THE VOTE COUNT QUESTION. IN THIS REGARD, LABOR BACKBENCH SOURCES HAVE REPORTED THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS CONSIDERING THE POSSIBILITY OF TALLYING VOTES BY DEVELOPMENT REGION. THE MOST TROUBLESOME OBSTACLE TO THE REFERENDUM NOW APPEARS TO BE THE HOUSE OF LORDS. HOWEVER, LABOR BACKBENCHERS, BOTH PRO- AND ANTI-MARKETEERS, BELIEVE LORD GEORGE-BROWN WILL NOT LEAD A MAJOR EFFORT TO BLOCK THE REFERENDUM. IT IS ALSO DOUBTFUL WHETHER THE CONSERVATIVES WOULD HAZARD CONTINUED BRITISH MEMBERSHIP BY SPONSORING OR JOINING SUCH AN EFFORT.

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5. COMMONS IS VIRTUALLY CERTAIN TO ENDORSE THE RENEGOTIATED TERMS OVERWHELMINGLY (ASSUMING A FAVORABLE GOVERNMENT RECOMMENDATION), AS MOST CONSERVATIVES WILL SUPPORT THE GOVERNMENT ON THIS ISSUE. MANY OF THE UNCERTAINTIES SURROUNDING THE QUESTION OF CONTINUED BRITISH MEMBERSHIP, ACCORDINGLY, EITHER HAVE BEEN REMOVED OR APPEAR LESS TROUBLESOME AS A RESULT OF THESE DEVELOPMENTS. RECENT OPINION POLLS INDICATE THE BRITISH PUBLIC PREFERS CONTINUED EC MEMBERSHIP TO WITHDRAWAL, BUT ALSO REVEAL THAT THIS PREFERENCE IS NOT STRONGLY HELD (LONDON 3557). THE ANTI-MARKETEERS DO NOT APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN DISHEARTENED BY THESE FINDINGS.

RICHARDSON

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## Message Attributes

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**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
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